

Case Study

David's journey to overcome panic attacks

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David is a 47 year old man who has lived alone for the last 8 years. He has three children, of which two are grown up and live away from home while the 15 year old boy is living with his mother but stays with his dad about two nights per week. David was married for 16 years and is now divorced. He is short and generally slim but with a pot belly, is physically active and healthy, appearing to be more choleric/melancholic in temperament. He is self-employed and even though he was very active in his own safe surroundings, his movements out into the wider world were limited – he did not travel out of his immediate environment very often.

Between 7-14 years the feeling life is developing and the imagination is unfolding as potential for future creativity in life. David experienced some major influences that effected his growth in this realm. He was a premature baby, spending 6 weeks in intensive care/bottle fed and not being physically held; he experienced his relationship with his mother as conflictual. He found it difficult to express his feeling life and one example was when his mother used to make him perform in public and he remembers feeling embarrassed by this, and being humiliated by her at times when he didn't do as she wanted. Then at the age of 9-10 years he was raped and nearly murdered by a stranger, and when he tried to tell his mother she laughed and told him not to be silly - she didn't believe him. So his fears, feelings and needs were closed down, not addressed or taken care of during this crucial time of development.

In his teenage years, in the time of developing his astral body (14-21) and its relationship to his incarnating "I", he was unsettled and rebellious, eventually being expelled from boarding school for smoking at 15 years old. Consequently, he was then publicly ostracised by his friends who were told by their parents to do so, and at 16 years, his parents kicked him out of home. His teenage years were very confusing and alone, and he had his first panic attack at 16-17. Thinking that he was 'going mad' he spent many years living in different places, drinking, smoking, and moving in and out of jobs to cope with it all.

At 21 years, he found out that his experience was called agoraphobia and panic attack, but he didn't tell anyone or seek help. During this developmental stage of sentient soul (21-28), he married and moved to the bush where he still lives on the same property, living a lifestyle in which he has more control over the anxiety. However, living in a relationship was stressful and he often became physically and verbally aggressive to his wife and still didn't tell anyone about the panic attacks until he was 37, but it was then too late to save the marriage.

From the biographical viewpoint, the potential unfolding of his development between 7-21 years was hindered by traumatic experiences which affected his relationship to the world throughout the soul phase of his development (21-42) and only began to be addressed consciously in his forties when there was a restlessness to change old patterns, and a stronger sense of the need to take responsibility for his life, to create something new, to develop a better relationship with his adult children.

The panic attacks usually occurred in stressful situations, about once a month, but used to be weekly when he was married. He often felt self-conscious, exposed and trapped when in front of other people – for example, driving a car and waiting at the traffic lights; walking down the street, going to public events, family events...

This was the first time he had done any counselling because he now feels annoyed and frustrated with his life, which has become limited by the high levels of anxiety and panic attacks. He says he shouldn't feel uncomfortable, cry or be angry – as it was not acceptable to express feelings and it was too scary as an adult to be vulnerable and express feelings. So, he was very judgemental about himself. For most of his life, and before going into the counselling process, he had avoided feeling and rated the severity of his anxiety symptoms generally as mostly 8-10 (10 being most severe). Research tells us that the main hindrance to recovery is avoidance.

In terms of the perspective of the inner activities of soul, of the threefold nature of the human being - his feeling life had been suppressed, stopping him feeling all the hurts from unresolved childhood issues and unmet inner needs. This then shows in how his moods had fluctuated from friendly to very nasty. When situations became too threatening he either exploded violently, verbally and physically or avoided fearful situations and became depressed. His thinking activity would become confused and irrational, while in his rhythmic system/feeling life there was anxiety, chest pains, racing heart, feeling breathless, while in his metabolic system his body reacted by sweating, wanting to run or fight, so that he would try anything to stop the 'hideous feelings of panic, the fear of being crazy, the chaos of feeling out of control.' The panic lives in the etheric/astral overlap of experience however, conditions in the body can be supportive or preventative of panic attacks, such as massage and medicines to enhance the etheric energy and help client be more present in their bodies.

Through the psychophonetics therapeutic process, David learnt how to relax and meditate more through connecting with nature, in which he felt a strong connection. It was important that he be able to invoke the strengths he had developed as well in preparation for allowing his suppressed feelings to be expressed in a safe place – feelings such as sadness about the death of his father. In this supportive environment he softened and burst into tears and described times of cruelty by his mother, loss of his father, of being raped ... and how he had developed an aggressive way of being in the world to compensate for not being able to cope with these emotions and feelings.

In one session, when sadness was expressed, he then felt shaky about showing his feelings and he wished to not feel shaky. Through a therapeutic process of using body awareness and gesture, he learnt how to 'exit' from this position and to see that by doing this he was not shaky anymore, thus enhancing his "I" presence and his ability to take care of his vulnerability. This was a very important experience as the intense discomfort and shakiness are the first bodily reactions that occur during a panic attack. In his past experiences this would lead to other bodily reactions such as prickly sensation on the back of the neck, tension in the guts, shortness of breath, sweaty palms, increased heartbeat and chest pain, hot flushes in the face, dizziness, increased blood pressure and an attack could last from ½ hour to 2-3 hours. This process had not resolved the deeper issues but enabled a beginning of being in charge.

Through the counselling sessions, David explored issues around becoming more empowered in his life – facing his fears and developing his capacities of inner strength to balance the inner soul life. Through conversation and action using non-verbal modes of knowing, we worked with the polarities of different dynamics operating in his soul life, to bring in more "I" presence, and also he learnt how to bring compassion for inner needs rather than judge himself harshly for having these unmet needs. In psychophonetics counselling, this process is called 'the compassion triangle' (ie. working with three main inner aspects - feeling needy; judging oneself for being needy; and the compassionate self), and when he found an inner aspect of himself that he felt was a missing in his adult life and he entered a process of reclaiming this

through compassion and encouragement, there was a gradual integration in body, soul and spirit.

As a young child and teenager, there was no-one available to guide and take care of his inner needs, and now he learnt that he could do this for himself as a process of 'self-parenting.' From the psychosocial perspective, experiences from every age echo in us all the time living in the etheric flow of the soul, and through gesture and sounds these experiences can be explored, brought into more conscious awareness and transformed.

Through working with his choices, increasing self-awareness, through gesture, imagination and sound work over a number of sessions, David developed more confidence in expressing his feelings and found inner resources that gave him strength. As he found the courage to explore his fear and to heal what needed to be healed, his panic attacks decreased.

Being able to use the non-verbal tools for himself in his everyday life is very empowering, and four months after beginning counselling David was asked to rate the severity of his anxiety now = 2-3, and he has had only one panic attack since beginning counselling. Generally, his life has improved, and since meditating regularly he is feeling calmer and more at ease; doing more activities with his children eg. he took them to the movies for the first time in 25 years; is more comfortable when driving; has reduced his drinking; and is more open and able to say how he really feels in a new current relationship.

After one year, the general rating of anxiety has been reduced from 8-10 to 1-2 in severity, due to facing his fears, allowing his feeling life to be expressed, healing unresolved issues and he also gained some new tools to use when required, is meditating regularly and going out into the wider world more often.